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THE OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GRADUATE NURSE OF TO-DAY

[The following papers were read at the Congress in Buffalo on the afternoon of Thursday, September 19, 1901. The discussion was curtailed because of the early adjournment on account of the funeral of President McKinley.—Ed.]

FIRST PAPER

BY KATHERINE DEWITT
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THE question of opportunity is not a difficult one. The problems which are facing the nursing world are of such importance, are so much in evidence, and are so insistent that a nurse must be blind and deaf who is ignorant of their existence. The thinkers and workers in the nursing profession all over the world are considering the questions of registration, preliminary training, teachers' courses, uniformity of education, combinations of small or special hospitals, post-graduate work, and the maintenance of alumnae associations. These and similar themes press closely upon us and demand attention. The difficulty lies in the question of responsibility. Who should bear it?

Graduate nurses may be divided into three classes—those who hold hospital positions, those who do private nursing, and those who have married or have for other reasons retired into private life. Their interest in nursing affairs dwindles as they get farther away in space or time from their place of training. Very few who have given up nursing work retain more than a vague interest in our doings. Those who do, those who hold the motto, "Once a nurse, always a nurse," are the most valuable of workers. They often have more leisure for thinking, more

time to devote to official responsibilities, and a broader view of affairs than those who are still in the ranks.

Private nurses have been in the past a most self-absorbed and indifferent body of women, thinking only of their personal aims and interests, caring little for their fellows. Those who have held hospital positions, especially hospital superintendents, being in constant touch with nursing affairs and seeing the abuses which need reform, have been the pioneers in all progressive movements and have labored almost alone. The alumnae associations, growing in all directions, are beginning to get hold of the scattered private nurses and to arouse their interest, but *all* graduate nurses, in whatever walk in life, have opportunities which should appeal to them—responsibilities which they should not shirk.

We are said to be heirs of the ages. Trained nurses of to-day are heirs of very difficult pioneer work, done by a band of energetic, efficient workers whose toil has been so effective that what would seem to require a century to bring about has been done in a third of that time. We come into line and find modern hospitals, well equipped, with training-schools attached, where nurses are taught in both theoretical and practical work. Are we to drink in all the knowledge offered us and devote the strength derived therefrom to concerns which affect ourselves alone? To do this is to miss the opportunity of doing our share of the world's work and results in narrowness and in imperfect development. It is most exasperating to the leaders in any line of work to see about them those who could be their helpers but who will not exert themselves. These are they who sit back and criticise the often faulty work done by others. Perhaps the work is faulty through lack of help which they could have given. Perhaps they think that if their own personal work is well done they have fulfilled their duty. They fail to realize that those who are not helping are hindering; that affairs of moment which will affect them personally in time are hanging in the balance, and that the influence of each person counts in the final turning of the scale.

Emerson says: "If you act, you show character; if you sit still, you show it. You think because you have spoken nothing when others spoke, and have given no opinion on the times, that your verdict is still expected with curiosity as a reserved wisdom. Far otherwise; your silence answers very loud. You have no oracle to utter, and your fellow-men have learned that you cannot help them."

There is a class of beings, not intentionally lazy or selfish, but of a timid, retiring disposition, who think they are unfitted by nature to

“speak in meeting” or to write papers, and that therefore they are of no value and must be counted out.

Yet these services, though conspicuous, are not the most useful. The nurse who thinks and reads and gains a clear idea of the standards for which we are striving is a help. She who in her daily life improves the opportunities of talking with and interesting other nurses is a help. To one who is alert many occasions will arise in which she may be of service, and she may, by her presence and interest, be of aid in meetings in which she takes no active part.

I wish I could tell at length the story of a member of my own Alumnæ Association, one of the “quiet sort.” She is married, she is in ill-health, she is an exile from home—excellent excuses for dropping out of sight; yet every alumnæ officer, every nurse-acquaintance, feels the inspiration which comes from her eager interest and unswerving loyalty. She is the kind of person who never forgets when her dues should be paid, who does not neglect to send in any change in her address, who responds promptly to any appeal made to our members in general. When our new nursing journal was contemplated, and we realized that it must have a goodly number of subscribers to make a start, she, in a land of strangers, secured five subscriptions. Do these things seem trifles? They are the trifles which count. An alumnæ association whose members were all animated by her spirit could work wonders.

I once heard an enthusiastic young minister, speaking of missions to some college students, say: “When we get to the Heavenly Jerusalem and hang our battered armor on the jasper walls and look back on the conflicts we have been waging, we shall say, ‘I’m glad I was in that battle.’” How is it with us? When the first number of our nursing journal appeared, those who had wrestled with the problem of getting it started, those who had given what they could to help establish it, those who had written for it, those who had skirmished for subscribers for it, could look upon it with joy and pride and say: “I am glad I was in that battle.” When the army nursing bill had been passed by Congress, those who had seen ills in the nursing service and had striven to remedy them, those who had borne unpleasant testimony for conscience’s sake, those who had worked early and late to rouse interest in the measure, could give a sigh of relief and say: “I am glad I was in that battle.”

Shall we fold our hands while others do the fighting? No! The battle is still on. Let us be thankful that the interesting part of the struggle is not over and that we may have a hand in it. Let us try to earn the right to enjoy the glow of pleasure which comes, when the battle is over, to those who have helped win the victory.

SECOND PAPER

By LINDA RICHARDS

Taunton, Mass.

If it is true that the responsibility of a community, a body, or an individual is measured by opportunity, the graduate nurse of to-day carries a burden which no one can call light,—a burden much heavier, I fear, than is realized by the majority of nurses.

Were we to ask the average graduate if she considers her advantages while in the training-school great, we might be surprised to hear in reply that she felt her opportunities to have been few, and not at all what she had expected or thought hers by right, and that she, as a matter of fact, considered her advantages as having been inferior to what they should have been, so prone is the human mind to fail to recognize present blessings in the attempt to catch sight of some fancied advantage not within reach.

To enable us to fully realize the opportunities of nurses recently graduated and of those still in training, let us enumerate a few of the more prominent.

In any well-regulated training-school of the present time we will find as a first requisite a superintendent of the school who is a graduate nurse, a woman having graduated from a school well known and of good report, and who has been chosen because of her fitness for the position.

If the school is connected with a large hospital, or if it is a school giving a three-years' course, graduate nurses will be found in charge of wards, thus giving the pupil-nurses the advantage of excellent instruction in their practical work, as well as superior teaching in the class- and lecture-room.

Text-books, many and varied, for class-work and reference—books especially adapted to the needs of nurses in training—are at her command. Many of these have been compiled by graduate nurses and superintendents of training-schools. A well-defined course of study, which (thanks to the Superintendents' Association) is now fairly uniform, will be found in all large training-schools. Added to this is given instruction in special branches, as some knowledge of dietetics, with practical instruction in the preparation of foods for the sick; hydrotherapy, limited largely to the giving of the various kinds of baths, care and use of the electric-battery, massage and physical culture, the application of heat by the latest and most approved methods, and a knowledge of bacteriology, with the different methods employed in destroying germs. These are a few of the many subjects which are taught in the training-

schools of the present day, and upon which nurses are required to pass a satisfactory examination before graduating.

Each branch is taught by an expert, thus giving pupils the surety of being well and uniformly instructed.

Demonstrations in modern methods of medical and surgical nursing, which are free to all nurses, are given by some of the larger hospitals, and these public demonstrations are of great value to nurses who have left the hospital and are in danger of growing rusty, and also to those who are still pupils in schools connected with smaller hospitals giving a more limited course of instruction.

Lecture courses for the benefit of private nurses are often provided by the alumnae of the school or by some graduate nurses' association which are open to all graduates for membership and consequent advantages.

Nurses' clubs have been organized by some schools. Connecting-links they are between the pupil-nurses and graduates, and productive of good in giving help and creating a feeling of unity.

The school alumnae, of which nearly every school of any standing boasts, and of which the national alumnae is an outgrowth, and which may be likened to the powerful oak grown from the tiny acorn.

The Nurses' Home, where nurses tired with the trying duties of the ward can go for rest and quiet. Nor would we forget that it was through the generosity of one noble woman that the first home for nurses in America was built, and so well has her example been followed that few indeed are the hospitals which have not a "Nurses' Home."

The Society of Superintendents of Training-Schools, which has during its few years of existence accomplished so much for the nursing profession and, through the different schools, for under-graduates as well. It is because of the existence of this society that we have an approach to a universal curriculum, which will in time be found in use in all schools, and because of which all graduates will stand upon common ground.

It is through the influence of this society that the narrow school feeling is giving place to the broader interest in nursing as a profession. All these advantages have been instrumental in placing the nursing profession in America upon a higher level, thus adding to its strength and power.

It is also through the efforts of this society that we have to-day the special course in hospital economics in connection with Columbia College, from which two classes have been graduated. Already are the benefits derived from the course so apparent that one feels like prophesying that the time is not far distant when to be able to secure a position as superin-

tendent of a training-school a diploma from this special course will be a necessity.

For a long time the need of a periodical especially adapted to the wants of nurses had been recognized, and the sentiment that only nurses who were thoroughly conversant with the needs of nurses could meet the demand grew daily stronger, and to-day we have *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING*, and this long-felt need has been satisfactorily met.

Each year has given added opportunities, and so quietly have they come that those not concerned in bringing them about fail to detect them.

Opportunities of which the most optimistic nurse of twenty-five years ago would not have dreamed are now open to the pupil-nurse, and this without her effort or thought.

To prove that these advantages are real and great, let us compare the advantages just enumerated with those of the earliest pupils, who, when they entered the training-school, found there no graduate superintendent, no trained nurses in charge of wards to instruct them in practical duties, no class instruction was given, and in most things they were their own teachers. Lectures were given irregularly, no notes upon them being expected. They were required to know but little, and walked by faith, not by sight. But meagre as the instruction was, the pupils were taught that from the time they entered the training-school to the end of their life they would be considered as persons of great and grave responsibility.

And if nurses trained under the conditions just mentioned were given such a burden of responsibility, what shall be said of the nurse who graduates with the numberless advantages of the present day?

Is it not just that more and better results be expected of her than of her less favored sister? Surely yes. The nurse of the present time is to be congratulated because of her many and varied privileges. But she is to constantly remember that hand in hand with these come heavy responsibilities. The first she will joyfully welcome. The last must be conscientiously borne.

Does some one ask, What are these responsibilities? The reply must be, Their name is legion. Two or three stand out so prominently that they almost name themselves. Let the nurse of to-day consider it her solemn duty to raise the standard ever higher. Let her keep in touch with every advanced movement. Let each year's work exceed in excellence that of the preceding year. Let her show to the world that her profession is one of the grandest, and that she is an honor to it. Let her prove a help and blessing wherever she is found.

The eyes of the world are upon her, and great things are expected

of her. Let her always carry this thought, "To whom much is given, of him is much required."

DISCUSSION.

MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK opened the discussion on these two papers, saying in part: "I think it was Mrs. Robb who said 'Once a nurse, always a nurse,' and I think both she and I feel very strongly the principle of that. It is not given to every one who leaves her school and active practice to do public work. Women who marry have many other duties, especially those who have families, and it is not always possible for them to take a very active part in nursing matters.

"After listening to Miss Richards's most excellent paper, it seems almost incredible that it was only nine short years ago that I came to the States for the first time, and had the opportunity of visiting the Johns Hopkins Hospital, where Mrs. Robb, then Miss Hampton, was superintendent of the Training-School. It seems to me almost impossible that nine years should have brought about such changes in the profession of nursing in America. In 1892-3 there was no organization of nurses in the United States. To-day Miss Richards has shown us the wonderful progress that has been made, especially in regard to organization. It is a most hopeful and encouraging report that has been placed before us, but, of course, all of this could not have been accomplished if a few of the old war-horses had not taken the matter in hand and with arduous work carried it through.

"Now it appears to me that you are so far advanced in this work in this country that the whole profession of nursing can take a part in the government in the United States. We in Great Britain are going along in very much the same lines, but it takes us longer to organize, because we are older and have more prejudices to uproot and overthrow.

"I have no doubt but that in a very short time there will be an international organization representing nurses from all over the world, and that what is accomplished in one country will benefit nurses in all the other countries.

"As a nurse who has taken up professional journalism, not from any talent or particular desire, but merely to get the work done and to voice the needs of the nurses in England, I would like to say a few words of congratulation to those who have instituted and organized *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING*, a publication which must do an immense amount of good for the nursing profession in all of the English-speaking countries of the world. I hope that after this Congress it will increase its circulation very much in England, Great Britain, and the Colonies, and that we shall have the work of your able editor, Miss Palmer. I speak very feelingly upon this subject of professional journalism, because I know the arduous work it takes to interest people in this class of journals. It takes a very great deal of patience and courage to edit such a journal, and wait the necessary time to see it a success."

MISS EARLY, of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital of Philadelphia (colored), said in part: "I would like to advocate the three-years' training. I did not have it myself, for the simple reason that my school was small. I had two-years' training, graduating in the Class of '99, and have been in the hospital for seven months as matron. I feel the need of the third year. We try to get women who are graduates from high-schools or who have had a good education, but there is too much crowded into the two-years' course. After serving twelve hours in the wards, pupils are too tired to listen to lectures or attend classes. If it were not for the nursing journals, we would be behind in a great many

things. I would say that *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING* is fine, also that *The Trained Nurse* is fine, and I read them both a great deal.

"I have been greatly benefited by this Congress. My mind has been broadened and I am confident that I am better able to go out and be what a trained nurse of to-day should be, because of it."

PRIVATE NURSING *

By MARGARET L. ROGERS

Superintendent of Nursing, Bridgeport Hospital, Conn.

OF all the professions now open to women there is none possessing the possibilities of nursing. The deeper our medical men penetrate into the science of medicine, the wider grows the horizon of the trained nurse.

Scarcely a quarter of a century ago the physician regarded her advent with a feeling of distrust, fearful that as soon as her training was completed she would proceed to the practice of medicine and in time share, if not entirely absorb, his circle of patients. Time has proved the fallacy of that idea, until to-day the reputable physician refuses to take a serious case unless the responsibility is shared by a competent nurse.

As a character-builder the training-school has no equal; I think it is its prevailing atmosphere of unselfishness which causes all the tiny germs of good that have long lain dormant in our natures to develop and helps us in time to overcome our most glaring errors. The regular routine, the unity of purpose, the absolute rule of willing subjects, leave their mark for all time upon the character and disposition of its pupils; and they must, because of this discipline, go forth better women, better equipped for the battle of life, whether to grace homes of their own or to become the temporary members of the homes of the suffering.

In the present day there are many fields in which the nurse may find an outlet for her activities. The need of hospitals, the demand in the army, and the increasing growth of district and settlement work give a choice of usefulness unknown to her sister of a few years past. However, it is in private nursing that the large majority find an opening most suited to their capabilities. The reason for this is because of the great pleasure in personal ministration. In other branches of the work, owing to lack of time or the inability to be in many places at the same time, one's work is apt to become largely that of the teacher and the guide, and the joy of personally making "a little comfortable the uncomfortable way" is seldom tasted.

* Read at the International Congress of Nurses, Buffalo, September 18-21, 1901.